

(19)

Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Offic eur péen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 005 986 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

published in accordance with Art. 158(3) EPC

(43) Date of publication:

07.06.2000 Bulletin 2000/23

(51) Int. Cl.⁷: **B41J 2/045, B41J 2/055,**

B41J 2/16

(21) Application number: 99957038.5

(86) International application number:

PCT/JP99/03198

(22) Date of filing: 16.06.1999

(87) International publication number:

WO 99/65689 (23.12.1999 Gazette 1999/51)

(84) Designated Contracting States:

DE FR GB

• KANNO, Isaku
Nara-shi, Nara 631-0062 (JP)

• TAKAYAMA, Ryoichi
Suita-shi, Osaka 564-0081 (JP)

• NOMURA, Koji
Shijonawate-shi, Osaka 575-0013 (JP)

(30) Priority: 18.06.1998 JP 17106098

(74) Representative:

Grünecker, Kinkeldey,
Stockmair & Schwanhäusser
Anwaltssozietät
Maximilianstrasse 58
80538 München (DE)

(71) Applicant:
Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd.
Kadoma-shi, Osaka 571-8501 (JP)

(72) Inventors:

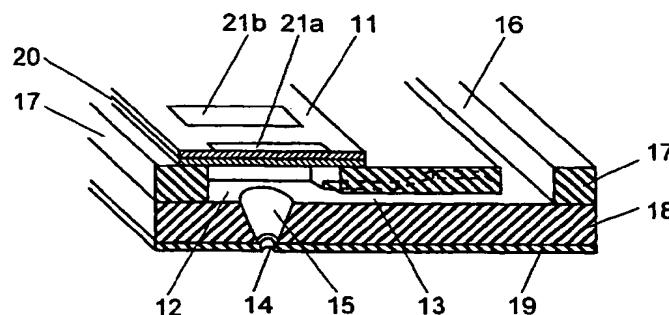
• MIKI, Katsumasa
Neyagawa-shi, Osaka 572-0004 (JP)
• NAKATANI, Masaya
Takarazuka-shi, Hyogo 665-0054 (JP)

(54) FLUID JETTING DEVICE AND ITS PRODUCTION PROCESS

(57) A fluid ejection device and production method thereof for an ink jet printer and the like for heightening density of a nozzle and improving efficiency of the production process. The through-hole 15 is provided to the glass substrate 18 to which the second silicon substrate 19 is directly bonded to form the ink outlet 14. The first

silicon substrate 17 is etched to form the pressure chamber 12, the ink channel 13 and the ink inlet 16, and bonded directly to the glass substrate 18. Subsequently, the piezoelectric thin film 11 having the elastic body 20 is bonded to right on the pressure chamber 12.

FIG. 1



Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a fluid ejection device to be used in a printhead of an ink jet printer for ejecting fluid such as ink in a well-controlled manner, and production method thereof.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] With the development of a computerized society in recent years, demand for office automation or OA devices has been growing rapidly. Under such circumstances, demand for various kinds of printers has become increasingly stronger, not only with respect to their performance as a recording means but for higher-speed printing and improved picture quality.

[0003] In widely used ink jet printers, the ink jet printhead of the on-demand system which enables a high-speed ejection of the ink at the user's will, is critical for the performance of the printer. The ink jet printhead, in general, comprises an ink channel, a pressure chamber where ink is pressurized, a pressurizing means for the ink such as an actuator, and an ink outlet through which the ink is ejected. To realize an on-demand ink jet printer system, a pressurizing means with high controllability is required. However, most of the conventional systems employ a bubble ejecting method whereby the ink is heated to produce bubbles, which eventually eject the ink (heating method), or a piezoelectric method in which ink is directly pressurized by a deformation of piezoelectric ceramics and the like.

[0004] Fig 11 is a sectional perspective view showing an example of the construction of a conventional ink jet printhead. The conventional ink jet printhead consists of a piezoelectric member 111, a pressure chamber 112, an ink channel 113, an ink outlet 114, a fluid (ink) inlet 115, a structure member A 116, a structure member B 117, a structure member C 118, a diaphragm 119 and individual electrodes 120 (120a, 120b).

[0005] On a first side of the piezoelectric member 111 individual electrodes 120 are formed thereon. On a second side thereof electrodes are also formed in the same manner (not depicted). The piezoelectric member 111 is bonded to the diaphragm 119 via the electrode on the second side.

[0006] The diaphragm 119 and the structure member A 116, the structure member B 117 and the structure member C 118 are bonded by an adhesive or similar material thereby forming a laminated structure. There is a cavity in the structure member A 116, where the pressure chamber 112 and the ink channel 113 are to be formed. In general, a plurality sets of the pressure chambers 112, the ink channel 113 and individual electrodes 120 are formed and disposed such that each set is separated from the other sets. The structure member B 117 is formed in the same manner with the ink inlet

115 being mounted additionally. On the structure member C 118, corresponding to the position of the pressure chamber 112, the ink outlet 114 is mounted. The ink is supplied through the ink inlet 115, and the ink channel 113 and the pressure chamber 112 are filled with ink.

[0007] The diaphragm 119 is made of a conductive material and has conductivity with the electrodes mounted on the bonded surface of the piezoelectric member 111. Thus, if an electric voltage is applied between the diaphragm 119 and the individual electrodes 120, the laminated section of the piezoelectric member 111 and the diaphragm 119 is deformed. At this time, an arbitrary location of the piezoelectric member 111, in other words, the location corresponding to an arbitrary pressure chamber 112 can be deformed by selecting an electrode to be applied with an electric voltage. The deformation pressurizes ink in the pressure chamber 112, and the amount of ink responsive to the pressure is ejected from the ink outlet 114. The amount of deformation depends on the electric voltage applied to the piezoelectric member 111. Therefore, by controlling the magnitude of the electric voltage and the location on which the electric voltage is applied, amount and location of the ink ejection can be arbitrarily changed.

[0008] The conventional thermal ink jet printhead, in general, is inferior to the piezoelectric method in terms of the response speed. On the other hand, in the case of the piezoelectric ink jet printhead, the displacement of the piezoelectric member and the diaphragm is restricted by the thickness of the piezoelectric member. If the piezoelectric member is too thick, a sufficient displacement can not be gained due to the rigidity of the piezoelectric member itself. If the area of the piezoelectric member is increased to effect a sufficient displacement, the ink jet printhead will become bigger making harder to achieve a higher density of the nozzle. As a result, material cost will increase. When the area of the piezoelectric member can not be increased, a higher driving voltage is required for a sufficient deformation.

[0009] A piezoelectric member with thickness of about 20 μ m have become available now by techniques of the thick film forming and the integrated firing, however, a higher density in the nozzle is still required for an improved picture quality. In order to reduce the area of the piezoelectric member to achieve a higher density of the nozzle, reduction of the thickness of the piezoelectric member is essential. However, conventional methods have limitations in this regard.

[0010] A cavity must be provided within the structures made of stainless steel or the like in order to form an ink channel, and for precise and complex ink channels, increased number of layers are required. Adhesive used on the bonded section is subjected to fluid for a long time, therefore, reliability of such material has always required close attention.

[0011] An object of the present invention is to provide a fluid ejection device such as an ink jet printhead with higher picture quality, higher reliability and lower

cost.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] A fluid ejection device of the present invention includes at least one chamber divided independently from other chambers, an ink channel communicating with the chamber, an ink outlet communicating with the chamber, and a pressure generating section having a laminated body made of a piezoelectric material of a thickness of not more than 7 μ m and an elastic body, the section covering one face of the chamber.

[0013] A production method of a fluid ejection device of the present invention includes the steps of: a process of forming a through-hole for the pressure chamber and a through-hole for the ink inlet on a first substrate; a process of bonding the first substrate and a second substrate; a process of bonding the second substrate and a third substrate; and a process of forming a pressure generating section comprising a laminated body including piezoelectric material and an elastic material such that the pressure generating section covers the through-hole for the pressure chamber.

[0014] According to the present invention, a thin film material of PZT related material deposited by sputtering method is used as a piezoelectric material.

[0015] According to the present invention, silicon and glass substrates are used as structure members which are etched and processed by sand-blasting.

[0016] The structures are directly bonded by processing the surfaces and heating without the use of resin or other adhesives.

[0017] The configuration discussed above allows the piezoelectric member to be thinner with ease, which contributes to a higher density of the nozzle. A plurality of silicon and glass substrates are simultaneously processed finely by etching and sand-blasting, thereby improving processing precision for products and reducing a number of production processes. The silicon and glass substrates can be directly bonded, therefore, long-term reliability against inflow of fluid is secured. Meanwhile, the substrates can be bonded at a time, which contributes to streamlining of the production processes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018]

Fig. 1 shows a sectional perspective view of a fluid ejection device in accordance with the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 2A-2D show a manufacturing process of a piezoelectric thin film of the first exemplary embodiment as set forth in Fig. 1.

Figs. 3A-3E show a manufacturing process of a silicon substrate of the first exemplary embodiment as

set forth in Fig. 1.

Figs. 4A-4E show a manufacturing process of an ink outlet of the first exemplary embodiment as set forth in Fig. 1.

Figs. 5A-5D show a manufacturing process of the fluid ejection device of the first exemplary embodiment as set forth in Fig. 1.

Figs. 6A-6F show an alternative manufacturing process of a silicon substrate.

Figs. 7A-7D show an alternative manufacturing process of an ink outlet

Fig. 8 shows a sectional perspective view of a fluid ejection device in accordance with the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 9A-9E show a manufacturing process of a silicon substrate of the second exemplary embodiment as set forth in Fig. 8.

Figs. 10A-10F show a manufacturing process of the fluid ejection device of the second exemplary embodiment as set forth in Fig. 8.

Fig. 11 shows a sectional perspective view of a fluid ejection device of the prior art.

Fig. 12 shows a plan view of the processed silicon substrate in accordance with the first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 13A-13E show a manufacturing process chart illustrating processing steps of the silicon and glass substrates.

Figs. 14A-14E show a manufacturing process chart illustrating another processing steps of the silicon and glass substrates.

Fig. 15A and 16B show processed condition of a silicon substrate in accordance with the second exemplary example of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

First exemplary embodiment

[0019] Fig. 1 is a perspective cross sectional view illustrating an example of a fluid ejection device comprising silicon, glass and piezoelectric thin films.

[0020] As shown in Fig. 1, a fluid ejection device in accordance with the first exemplary embodiment comprises the following elements; a piezoelectric thin film 11, a pressure chamber 12, an ink channel 13, an ink outlet 14, a through-hole 15, an ink inlet 16, a first silicon substrate 17, a glass substrate 18, a second silicon substrate 19, an elastic body 20 and individual electrodes 21(21a, 21b...). More specifically, the fluid ejection device of this embodiment comprises a laminated body made of the first silicon substrate 17, the glass substrate 18 and the second silicon substrate 19, the piezoelectric thin film 11, the elastic body 20 and the individual electrodes 21 mounted on the piezoelectric thin film 11.

[0021] The first silicon substrate 17 is provided with

such elements as the pressure chamber 12 formed as an individual through-section at the position corresponding to the individual electrodes 21, the ink channel 13 formed up to the midway in the direction of the thickness of the silicon substrate 17 in such a manner that it communicates with the pressure chamber 12, and the ink inlet 16, a through-section communicating with the ink channel 13. The opening area of the ink channel 13 starts to expand outwardly as it goes away from the pressure chamber 12 (illustrated as dotted lines in Fig. 1). Fig. 1 shows a single set of the individual electrodes, the pressure chamber, and the ink outlet and so on. A fluid ejection device generally has a plurality of units constructed in a similar manner including the individual electrodes, the pressure chamber and the ink outlet. Fig. 1 shows two sets of the individual electrodes 21 (21a and 21b).

[0022] Next, the first silicon substrate 17 and the glass substrate 18 are bonded, whereby the pressure chamber 12 and the ink channel 13 are sealed except for some portion. The glass substrate 18 is provided with a through-hole 15 on the position corresponding to the pressure chamber 12. Corresponding to the center of the through-hole 15, an ink outlet 14 with an area smaller than the opening portion of the through-hole 15 is formed on the second silicon substrate 19. The glass substrate 18 and the second silicon substrate 19 are bonded. The piezoelectric thin film 11 is bonded through the elastic body 20 on the face of the pressure chamber 12 opposite the through-hole 15. The piezoelectric thin film 11 has the individual electrode 21a formed on front surface thereof, and other individual electrode on the back surface (not shown in the drawing).

[0023] The fluid which has flowed in from the ink inlet 16 fills the ink channel 13, pressure chamber 12 and the through-hole 15, and stays around the ink outlet 14. If an electric voltage is applied between the electrodes on both sides of the piezoelectric thin film 11, the laminated body of the piezoelectric thin film 11 and the elastic body 20 will be deformed. Providing the elastic body 20 is made of a conducive material, it will conduct with the electrode mounted on the back face of the piezoelectric thin film, and deformation occurs when voltage is applied between the elastic body 20 and individual electrodes 21. The exact position of the laminated body to be deformed can be changed freely by selecting the portion of the individual electrode 21 to be applied with voltage. The deformation of the laminated body comprising the piezoelectric thin film 11 and the elastic body 20 brings the fluid in the pressure chamber 12 under pressure, and the fluid is ejected from the ink outlet 14 in a volume responsive to the strength of the pressure.

[0024] In general, a piezoelectric thin film 11 is made of material with high piezoelectric constant such as $PbZr_xTi_{1-x}O_3$ or other PZT related material. A thin film made of such material is manufactured, under certain condition, by depositing a film on a MgO substrate

for the piezoelectric thin film by the sputtering method. The MgO substrate for the piezoelectric thin film is etched in phosphate or in a similar chemical whereby a thin film consisting of the piezoelectric thin film 11 is easily obtained.

[0025] The shape of the ink outlet 14 affects ejection speed and the area of the ejected fluid, as such it is a key element determining the printing performance of an ink jet printer. A smaller opening area of the ink outlet 14 enables finer printing, however, an excessive difference in area from the pressure chamber would result in a large loss, thus desirable ejection can not be expected. This loss can be reduced when the glass substrate 18 is provided with the through-hole 15 of which a cross-sectional area tapers from the pressure chamber toward the ink outlet. Moreover, this construction makes the shape of the ink outlet more controllable than a construction having a tapered hole alone, resulting in the ink outlet 14 with finer and more uniform shape.

[0026] When pressure is applied, the pressure is not kept within the ink outlet 14 but transmitted to the ink channel 13 which may trigger a back flow of the fluid. To solve this problem, the ink channel 13 is shaped in a manner that its opening space (illustrated as dotted lines in Fig. 1) tapers toward the pressure chamber 12 thereby resistance against the back flow increases, and even a better ink ejection is achieved. The same effect can be obtained by providing a narrower section in the ink channel 13. When the area of the narrower section in the ink channel 13 is about 0.5 to 1.5 times as large as the area of the ink outlet 14, good ejection is secured by preventing the back flow.

[0027] The piezoelectric thin film 11 of several μm in thickness can easily be obtained using the sputtering method. It is thinner when compared with conventional films. When the piezoelectric thin film 11 becomes thinner, its own rigidity is reduced, thus a larger deformation is more easily obtained. When the magnitude of deformation is the same, strain is smaller with the thinner film, therefore, reliability for repeated loading can be improved. As it has been described, the thinner piezoelectric material not only contributes to a reduced size of the actuator and its surrounding area and the area of the ink outlet 14, but also contributes to a higher density and in turn, a higher picture quality.

[0028] Regarding the thickness of the piezoelectric thin film 11, if it is too thin, a poor driving force would result conversely, manufacturing thicker material by the thin film technique is inefficient since it requires a longer sputtering time. Therefore, a reasonable thickness of a piezoelectric thin film is not more than $7\mu m$ in terms of a secure driving force and film making cost. Since the actuator is not deformed when it is only made of the piezoelectric thin film 11, it must form a laminated structure with the elastic body 20. In order for the elastic body 20 to actually function as the elastic body 20 while maintaining conductivity, stainless steel or other metallic material is used. However, the thickness of and the

rigidity determined by nature of the material of each layer affect the position of the neutral plane during deformation. The further the neutral plane moves away from the boundary surface, the more the stress generated at the boundary surface increases, increasing the risk of delamination. Conversely, when the neutral plane is formed inside the piezoelectric member, driving efficiency declines. Therefore, in order to secure the neutral point in the vicinity of the boundary surface, the thickness of the elastic body made of metallic material must be the same or smaller than the thickness of the piezoelectric member.

[0029] Each piezoelectric material has to function only for each pressure chamber, therefore, the piezoelectric material is not needed in the partitions of adjacent pressure chambers. Rather, when the piezoelectric material is separated by every pressure, interference between adjacent piezoelectric members and stress imposed on the piezoelectric material during the bonding process and actual driving can be avoided, so that cracking in the piezoelectric material is prevented.

[0030] Fig. 2 shows sectional views illustrating an example of the production method for dividing the piezoelectric material.

[0031] First, as shown in Fig. 2A, a material for the individual electrode 23 and a piezoelectric thin film 22 are deposited on a MgO substrate for the piezoelectric thin film 24 by the sputtering method. Second, the material for the individual electrode 23 and the piezoelectric thin film 22 are selectively etched away and divided into individual electrodes 23a, 23b and 23c, and piezoelectric thin films 22a, 22b and 22c respectively (Fig. 2B). Third, an elastic body 28 made of chromium or other metallic material is formed with a resin material 25 such as polyimide coated thereon (Fig. 2C). Then, a silicon substrate 27 is bonded to the dividing portion or the portion where the material for the individual electrode 23 and the piezoelectric thin film 22 are etched away selectively, in a manner that only pressure chambers 26a, 26b and 26c are correspondingly in contact with the piezoelectric thin films 22a, 22b and 22c. Finally, the MgO substrate for the piezoelectric thin film is immersed in a phosphate solution and removed (Fig. 2D). As a result, the dividing portions are strengthened by the resin material 25. Moreover, since the rigidity of the resin material 25 is low, it does not seriously affect the driving.

[0032] The construction discussed above realizes a fluid ejection device which ejects fluid from an arbitrarily selected ink outlet in a plane of a substrate.

[0033] Following is an example of a manufacturing process. Figs. 3A-3E, Figs. 4A-4E and Figs. 5A-5D show sectional views illustrating the manufacturing process of the fluid ejection device of the present invention.

[0034] Figs. 3A-3E show an example of the processing of the first silicon substrate 31. Both sides of a first silicon substrate 31 as shown in Fig. 3A are coated with resists 32a and 32b, and the patterning is

carried out by the photolithography technique (Fig. 3B). In this process, patterns are formed corresponding to the position and shape of each pressure chamber 34 and ink channel 33.

5 [0035] Next, silicon is etched from the side coated with the resist 32b by the reactive ion etching method (RIE). The etching stops at the predetermined depth in the direction of the thickness of the substrate with an opening being formed on only one side, forming an ink channel 33 (Fig. 3C). Then, etching is performed from the resist 32a side forming a through-section communicating with the ink channel 33. By this process, a pressure chamber 34 and an ink inlet 35 are formed (Fig. 3D). Finally, the resists 32a and 32b are removed to conclude the manufacturing process of the first silicon substrate 31 (Fig. 3E).

[0036] Figs. 4A-4E show an example of a manufacturing process of a glass substrate 41 and a second silicon substrate 44.

20 [0037] First, both sides of the glass substrate 41 are coated with resists 42a and 42b. Then, a pattern is formed only on the resist 42a side at a place corresponding to the pressure chamber (Fig. 4A). Next abrasive grains are sprayed by the sand-blasting method from the resist 42a side, and then a through-hole 43 is formed by processing the glass substrate 41. (Fig. 4B). In this process, the through-hole 43 is formed in a manner that it tapers from the side being sprayed with the abrasive grains toward the other opening. The resist 42b protects the other face from damage caused by the abrasive grains.

25 [0038] Then, after the resists 42a and 42b are removed, the second silicon substrate 44 and the glass substrate 41 are directly bonded by direct bonding technique. Patterning of a resist 45 coated on the second silicon substrate 44 is processed so as to form an ink outlet 46 in corresponding positions to each pressure chamber (Fig. 4C).

30 [0039] The direct bonding technique is a method to bond substrates by washing the substrates and heating them without using any inclusions such as resin or applying a high electric voltage as it is the case with the anodic bonding method. In the direct bonding, for example, glass and silicon with a smooth surface are washed in peroxomonosulfuric acid, peroxodisulfuric or the like and stacked after drying.

35 [0040] When the substrates are pressed, certain bonding is gained, and the stacked body is heated at several hundreds °C to increase bonding strength. This method can lead to an extremely strong bonding when optimum substrate material and washing and heating conditions are provided. For example, one delamination test revealed that in the bonding of glass substrates, bonding strength was so high that, in some mode, damage was caused not on the bonded surfaces but inside the substrate itself. The direct bonding realizes high reliability free from degradation in the bonded layers occurring with the lapse of time or in contact with fluid as it is

the case with the bonding using resin or similar material. Furthermore, the manufacturing process is very simple requiring only washing and heating processes. Following the bonding process, the second silicon substrate 44 is etched by RIE (Fig. 4D) and the resist 45 is removed to complete the process (Fig. 4E).

[0041] As described above, with the method illustrated in Figs. 4A-4E, aligning of both through-holes can be done easily. Moreover, the substrates can be handled more easily as the total thickness of the stacked substrates is increased by bonding. As a result, a thinner second substrate can be used, and a through-hole for the ink outlet on the second silicon substrate, which has a strong influence on the ejection performance, can be formed precisely and uniformly.

[0042] Figs. 5A-5D show sectional views illustrating the bonding process of a laminated body comprising a processed first silicon substrate 56, a glass substrate 57 and a second silicon substrate 58 and a piezoelectric thin film 59 (including elastic body).

[0043] First, the first silicon substrate 56 already processed in a manner illustrated in Figs. 3A-3E and the laminated body of the second silicon substrate 58 and the glass substrate 57 processed in a manner illustrated in Figs. 4A-4E (Fig. 5A) are directly bonded by the same method described above (Fig. 5B). Before this process, a pressure chamber 51 and a through-hole 54 are aligned. Next, the piezoelectric thin film 59 (including an elastic body) formed on a substrate 60 made of MgO or the like for the piezoelectric thin film 60 is bonded onto the top of the pressure chamber 51 (Fig. 5C). Finally, the MgO substrate 60 for the piezoelectric thin film is removed to complete the process (Fig. 5D). When the substrate 60 for the piezoelectric thin film is made of MgO, it can be removed by immersing it in a phosphate solution and the like.

[0044] With the aforementioned method, a micro-fabrication technique can be adopted to realize a high-precision and high-efficiency processing. Moreover, bonding process is simple and the end product is highly reliable. When the sand-blasting is used, fragile material such as glass can be processed rapidly with the through-hole automatically given an even tapering shape making itself suitable for ejecting the ink. The technique described above has a potential of processing a variety of shapes by pattern designing and is applicable to a wide range of designs.

[0045] The ink channel forming method of the aforementioned processing method for the first silicon substrate 56 forms a groove with a predetermined depth in the direction of the thickness of the substrate, however, an alternative method for forming a through-section as the ink channel is also available. The method is described below.

[0046] Figs. 6A-6F are sectional views illustrating processing and assembly methods of a first silicon substrate 61.

[0047] The first silicon substrate 61 is coated with a

first resist 62, and the patterning is carried out in predetermined positions (Fig. 6B) so as to allow an ink channel 63, a pressure chamber 64 and an ink inlet 65 to be processed. Next, the ink channel 63, the pressure chamber 64 and the ink inlet 65 are formed by RIE or similar technique in a manner that each of the three elements mentioned above forms a through-section extending through the thickness direction of the silicon substrate 61 (Fig. 6C). After the first resist 62 is removed, the first silicon substrate 61 is directly bonded to a sealing glass substrate 66, coated with a second resist 67 and patterning is carried out (Fig. 6D). Following this process, portions corresponding to the pressure chamber 64 and the ink inlet 65 are processed by the sand-blasting forming a first glass through-hole 68 and a second glass through-hole 69 respectively communicating with the pressure chamber 64 and the ink inlet 65 (Fig. 6E). If the first silicon substrate 61 has to be protected from the sand-blasting, it can be coated with resists on both sides. Alternatively, processing by the sand-blasting can be stopped immediately before penetration, to form a glass through-hole by etching the remaining glass by ammonium fluoride and the like. Finally, the second resist 67 is removed to complete the process (Fig. 6F).

[0048] Fig. 12 shows a schematic view illustrating the shape of the first silicon substrate already processed by the aforementioned method, looked from the surface of the substrate. The ink channel 63 which communicates with the pressure chamber 64 and ink inlet 65, is shaped in a manner that it tapers toward the pressure chamber, as is illustrated. The purpose of this design is to effect a good ejection by increasing resistance against the back flow of fluid as described already.

[0049] With the aforementioned method, the processing of the first silicon substrate 61 is efficient since it does not require additional processing, as set forth in Figs. 3A-3E. In addition, the ink channel 63 can be shaped evenly as it is determined by the thickness of the first silicon substrate 61. Moreover, the cavity in the pressure chamber can be expanded by the thickness of the sealing glass substrate 66 whereby more fluid can be injected into the pressure chamber, contributing to easily realize an optimum ejection condition. If a silicon substrate itself is thick, the formation of a through-hole becomes difficult. This method is very effective in this regard as well.

[0050] One end of the ink channel 63 is sealed in the process described in Fig. 6, therefore, bonding to other elements is also possible, as was the case with the other examples shown in Fig. 5. In Fig. 6, the glass substrate was processed after being bonded directly to the silicon substrate. However, this method is also applicable to the other processes.

[0051] Alternative method for forming an ink channel is given below as an example, referring to Fig. 13. The glass substrate 57 already given the through-hole 54 by the sand-blasting (Fig. 13A) is directly bonded to

the first silicon substrate 61 (Fig. 13B). Next, the first silicon substrate 61 is coated with the resist 62 and patterning is carried out (Fig. 13C). The resist here is patterned as shown in Fig. 12, a plan view. Then, through-holes 64, 65 and an through-hole for ink channel 63 corresponding to the pressure chamber and the ink inlet are processed at a time (Fig. 13D) and the resist 62 is removed to complete the process (Fig. 13E).

[0052] With this method, the total thickness of the substrate becomes larger thereby intensifying the strength, thus, damages occurring during the processing can be prevented. In addition, the direct bonding which is easily influenced by dust and dirt is conducted at first, therefore, concerns over the influence of such elements can be eliminated in subsequent processes. Since the substrates are bonded directly, erosion into the boundary surfaces during etching is not such a serious source of concern, unlike bonding using resin or other similar material. Furthermore, because the processing on the first silicon substrate is conducted after the bonding of the glass substrate and the first silicon substrate, aligning of through-holes are easy. Increased effective thickness of the substrate by lamination reduces the incident of cracking. In addition, etching on the first silicon substrate is stopped at the bonding plane with the glass substrate, shape of grooves can be uniformly controlled, whereby highly uniformed channels are formed.

[0053] The following processing methods are applicable to the other methods of this embodiment described earlier (Fig. 3A-Fig. 5D). The first silicon substrate 31 is coated with the resist 32a and 32b, and patterning is carried out (Fig. 14A). The silicon substrate 31 is processed by RIE up to the certain depth in the direction of the thickness to form the ink channel 33 (Fig. 14B). Next, the first silicon substrate 31 is bonded directly to the glass substrate 57 on which the through-hole 54 is already formed by the sand-blasting (Fig. 14C). The first silicon substrate 31 is coated with a resist 32c and patterning is carried out (Fig. 14D). Then, through-holes 34, 35 corresponding to the pressure chamber and the ink inlet are processed on the first silicon substrate 31 by RIE (Fig. 14E). This method can facilitate positioning and controlling of the size of the through-hole 34 to be processed on the first silicon substrate 31 precisely since it can be conducted by referring to the through-hole 54 of the glass substrate 57. Etching speeds are different between the bonded surfaces of the first silicon substrate 31 and the glass substrate 57 as the characteristics of these materials are different. As a result, processing of the through-hole 54 is precisely stopped thereby forming the through-holes uniformly.

[0054] The same method can be applied to the bonding process of the glass substrate 71 and the second silicon substrate 72 as shown in Fig. 7A-7D. In this case as well, a through-hole can be formed after bond-

ing them directly.

[0055] In addition, by making a second silicon substrate 72 thinner by lapping, a finer and more precise processing can be expected..

5 [0056] Figs. 7A-7D show sectional views illustrating an example of the process for thinning the second silicon substrate 72 by lapping.

[0057] A glass substrate 71 and a second silicon substrate 72 are directly bonded as set forth in the foregoing example (Fig. 7A). After this process, the second silicon substrate 72 is lapped to reduce its thickness (Fig. 7B) and subsequently, a through-hole 73 and an ink outlet 74 are formed by the sand-blasting and RIE (Figs. 7C and 7D). If the second silicon substrate 72 is thick, processing takes time and tends to be uneven, which makes difficult to form uniform holes. Moreover, a very small and deep through-hole is difficult to form.

10 [0058] Therefore, the second silicon substrate 72 is preferably thin. However, in the case of a single silicon plate, there is a limitation in terms of the handling during the manufacturing process and the yield of the processing. The direct bonding with the glass substrate increases rigidity, and thus the substrate can be lapped with ease. After the lapping the silicon substrate can be sent as it is to the next process.

15 [0059] In order to realize a fluid ejection device with a higher ejection density, diameter of the ink outlet must be as narrow as less than tens of μm , and if the silicon plate too is thinned to around $50\mu\text{m}$ or less, a more compact ink outlet, higher in density and uniform in shape can be formed.. Since the through-holes on the glass substrate and the second silicon substrate are processed after the substrates are bonded, there is no need for aligning in bonding. Moreover, as the substrates are bonded prior to the processing, there is no risk of damage on the bonded surfaces during processing, or gathering of dirt, thereby effecting a good bonding.

20 [0060] If there is no problem with the lapping, the direct bonding and lapping will be carried out after a through-hole is formed in the glass substrate. Needless to say, the method can also produce a similar effect when the first silicon substrate is excessively thick.

25 [0061] The through-hole processed by the sand-blasting has a shape tapering from the opening exposed to the spraying of the abrasive grain toward the other end. Therefore, although it is slightly affected by the size of the abrasive grain and speed to spray, if the thickness of the glass plate and the diameter of the opening exposed to the spray of the abrasive grains (opening area of the resist) are uniformly set, the diameter of the opening on the through-side is naturally set as well. Thus, by setting the thickness of the glass plate and the diameter of the opening on the spray side so that the diameter of the opening on the through-hole side is slightly larger than the diameter of the ink outlet, an optimum shape is uniquely processed. In order to deal with the ink outlet with the diameter tens of μm or less, in the case of the glass substrate having a thick-

ness of 0.8mm or less, the following condition is applied to the thickness of glass substrate: approx. $1.2 \text{ to } 1.9 \times (r_g - r_s)$, where "rg" is the diameter of the spray side, and "rs" is the diameter of the through-hole side.

Second exemplary embodiment

[0061] Fig. 8 shows a sectional perspective view illustrating a fluid ejection device according to the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0062] In Fig. 8, a silicon substrate 86, a first glass substrate 87 and a second glass substrate 88 are directly bonded as described in the first exemplary embodiment, forming a laminated body. The silicon substrate 86 has ink outlets 84(84a, 84b) having openings formed on the edge of the substrate, a pressure chamber 82 penetrating and communicating with the ink outlets 84, and a through-hole which partially forms an ink inlet 85, each of them formed by RIE or similar method. The first glass substrate 87 also has a through-section. A part of the through section communicates with the pressure chamber 82 and forms an ink channel 83 while another part is partially forming the ink inlet 85.

[0063] A laminated body comprising a piezoelectric thin film 81 having individual electrodes 90(90a, 90b) mounted thereon and an elastic body 89 is bonded right on the pressure chamber 82. Each pressure chamber 82 and the ink channel 83 are separated from each other and are independent. The individual electrodes 90a, 90b are disposed corresponding to each pressure chamber 82. The second glass substrate 88 seals one end of the through-section of the first glass substrate 87, forming a part of the ink channel 83. The fluid, supplied from the ink inlet 85, fills the pressure chamber 82 via the ink channel 83, and is brought under pressure by the displacement of the piezoelectric thin film 81 which occurs when applied with an electric voltage, and ejected from the ink outlets 84a and 84b.

[0064] Following is the description of a manufacturing method.

[0065] Figs. 9A-9E show sectional views illustrating the processing method of a silicon substrate.

[0066] First, both faces of a silicon substrate 91 as shown in Fig. 9A are coated with resists 92a and 92b, and patterning is carried out (Fig. 9B). Next, one side of the silicon substrate 91 is shallowly etched by RIE and an ink outlet 93 is formed (Fig. 9C). Then, a through-section is formed from the other face to form a pressure chamber 94 and an ink inlet 95 in a manner that the pressure chamber 94 partially communicate with the ink outlet 93 (Fig. 9D). Finally, the resists are removed from both sides to complete the process (Fig. 9E).

[0067] Figs. 10A-10F show sectional views illustrating assembly method of the whole device.

[0068] A first glass substrate 105 of which a through-section is already processed by the sand-blasting with an ink channel 106 being formed therein, is

5 directly bonded to a silicon substrate 101(Fig. 10B) which is already processed by the method shown in Fig. 9A-9E (Fig. 10A). In this bonding, the ink channel 106 is set to conduct with a pressure chamber 103 and an ink inlet 104, and the direct bonding is carried out on the face with an ink outlet 102. Next, a second glass substrate 107 and the first glass substrate 105 are directly bonded to seal one side of the ink channel 106 (Fig. 10C).

10 [0069] As shown in the description of the first exemplary embodiment, a piezoelectric thin film 108 and an elastic body 109 disposed on a MgO substrate 110 are bonded (Fig. 10D), and the MgO substrate 110 is removed by soaking in a phosphate solution (Fig. 10E). 15 Finally, when the laminate body made of the three substrates are divided, it is diced at right angles to the longitudinal direction of the ink outlet 102 so that the opening of the ink outlet 102 can face outside (Fig. 10F).

20 [0070] The shape of the ink outlet 102 is an important factor as it determines the fluid ejection capability. When the ink outlet 102 is very fine in shape, however, it might be chipped and the shape is damaged during the dicing process discussed above. One of the methods to avoid such damage is to cut the silicon substrate at the point where an ink outlet is to be formed prior to forming the ink outlet by etching the silicon substrate. This eliminates the processing after the ink outlet is formed. When the cuffing causes problems in the

25 processing of the wafer, another method can be adopted in which the portion where the ink outlet is to be formed is cut into up to a certain point rather than cut completely. For example, as shown in Fig. 15A and Fig. 15B, respectively illustrating sectional view of the silicon substrate 101 and a plan view of the same looked from below, a recessed portion 130 is formed on the silicon substrate 101. An ink outlet groove 102 is formed transversely of the recessed portion 130. When dividing the whole substrate, it is cut along a cutting-plane line 140

30 by a blade narrower than the recessed portion 130, so that the ink outlet is not processed on cutting. Figs. 15A and 15B, numeral 103 represents pressure chamber, and numeral 104 an ink inlet. With the above-mentioned method, the ink outlets are formed completely at the same time when the grooves are engraved on the silicon substrate, leaving no need for processing afterwards. Thus, the shape of ink outlets are maintained uniformly and ink ejecting capability is not damaged.

35 [0071] With all the embodiments of the present invention, everything is formed by laminating plane members, therefore, fine processing is easy and structure can become finer. Further, the following efficient process can be adopted. At first a number of unit structures as shown in Fig. 9 or Fig. 15 are embedded like a 40 matrix on a large silicon substrate as well as first and second glass substrates. Then the substrates are bonded by a method shown in Fig. 10, and cut into individual units. In this manner, a great number of fluid ejec-

tion devices are produced at a time, making the process very efficient.

[0072] According to the exemplary embodiments discussed above, the effect of the fine processing, direct bonding and piezoelectric thin film as shown in the first exemplary embodiment, is obtained at a time. In addition, a fluid ejection device with a different ejection mode in which fluid is ejected from an edge of a substrate can be produced. With this method, an ink outlet is designed freely by patterning resist, which greatly contributes to the optimization of the shape. An easy, uniform and fine controlling of the ink outlet area is possible just by adjusting width and depth of the groove. If an ink channel of the first glass substrate is formed by etching up to the midway of the substrate rather than penetration, the second glass substrate is not necessary, therefore, only one direct bonding is required to complete the process. Thus, needless to say, further reduction in manufacturing steps can be expected.

[0073] As described so far, according to the present invention, a fluid ejection device with a smaller and higher density of ink outlets can be formed by employing micro-fabrication technique of silicon and glass substrates and employing a piezoelectric thin film. As processing and lamination are conducted from the direction perpendicular to the plane of the substrate, a plurality of units are produced, thus productivity and design freedom are high. As substrates are directly bonded to each other, adhesive materials are not needed, whereby process management is simplified, and the factor which deteriorates the long-term reliability in sealing capability of fluid can be eliminated.

[0074] As a result, an ink jet printhead of on-demand system for an ink jet printer with higher density, higher reliability and lower cost can be achieved.

Reference Numerals

[0075]

- 11, 22, 59, 81, 108 Piezoelectric thin film
- 12, 26a, 26b, 26c, 34, 51, 64, 82, 94, 103 Pressure chamber
- 13, 33, 52, 63, 83, 106 Ink channel
- 14, 46, 53, 74, 84a, 84b, 93, 102 Ink outlet
- 15, 43, 54, 73 Through-hole
- 16, 35, 55, 65, 85, 95, 104 Ink inlet
- 17, 31, 56, 61 First silicon substrate
- 18, 41, 57, 71 Glass substrate
- 19, 44, 58, 72 Second silicon substrate
- 20, 28, 89, 109 Elastic body
- 21 Individual electrode
- 23 Material for the individual electrode
- 23a, 23b, 23c, 90a, 90b Individual electrode
- 24, 60, 110 MgO substrate for the piezoelectric thin film
- 25 Resin material
- 27, 86, 91, 101 Silicon substrate

- 5 32a, 32b, 32c, 42a, 42b, 45, 67, 92a, 92b Resist
- 62 First resist
- 66 Sealing glass substrate
- 67 Second resist
- 68 First glass through-hole
- 69 Second glass through-hole
- 87, 105 First glass substrate
- 88, 107 Second glass substrate
- 130 Recessed portion
- 140 Cutting-plane line

Claims

1. A fluid ejection device comprising:
 - 15 at least one chamber divided independently from other chambers;
 - an ink channel communicating with said chamber;
 - 20 an ink outlet communicating with said chamber; and
 - 25 a pressure generating section comprising a laminated body made of a piezoelectric-material of a thickness of not more than 7 μ m and an elastic body, said section covering one face of said chamber
2. The fluid ejection device according to claim 1, wherein said elastic body is made of a metallic material with a thickness of the same or less than said piezoelectric material.
3. The fluid ejection device according to claim 1, wherein said piezoelectric material is divided corresponding to each chamber, and a layer of resin is disposed at least on the dividing sections of said piezoelectric material.
- 35 4. The fluid ejection device according to claim 1, wherein said chamber, said ink channel and said ink outlet are formed by laminating a plane member of a silicon plate and a glass plate.
5. The fluid ejection device according to claim 1, wherein chief ingredient of said piezoelectric material is $PbZr_xTi_{1-x}O_3$.
- 40 6. The fluid ejection device according to claim 4, wherein said silicon plate and glass plate are directly bonded by direct bonding technique.
7. A production method of a fluid ejection device comprising the steps of:
 - 45 a process A1 of forming a through-hole for the pressure chamber and a through-hole for the ink inlet on a first substrate;
 - 50 a process B of bonding the first substrate and a

second substrate;
a process C of bonding the second substrate and a third substrate; and
a process D of forming a pressure generating section comprising a laminated body including piezoelectric material and an elastic material such that the pressure generating section covers the through-hole for the pressure chamber.

8. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 7 further comprising the steps of:
a process A2 of forming a groove for ink channel partially communicating with the through-holes for the pressure chamber and the ink inlet on the first substrate;
a process E of forming a through-hole tapering from the end in contact with the first substrate on the second substrate; and
a process F of forming a through-hole for the ink outlet on the third substrate.

9. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 8, wherein said process A1 is carried out after said process A2 and said process B.

10. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 7 further comprising the steps of;
a process A3 of forming a through-hole for ink channel on the first substrate;
a process E of forming a through-hole tapering from the end in contact with the first substrate on the second substrate;
a process F of forming a through-hole for the ink outlet on the third substrate;
a process G of forming a through-hole for the pressure chamber on a fourth substrate; and
a process H of forming a groove for ink channel by bonding the first and fourth substrates.

11. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 10, wherein said process A1 and said process A3 are conducted after said process E and said process B.

12. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 8 or 10, wherein said process F is conducted after said process E and said process C.

13. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 8 or 10, wherein said process E and said process F are conducted after said process C.

14. The production method of a fluid ejection device

5 according to claim 8 or 10, wherein said process C is conducted after said process E and said process F, or after said process E, and said method further comprising a step for thinning at least a section of the third substrate by lapping, the section corresponding to the through-hole formed on the second substrate.

10 15. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 8 or 10, wherein thickness of the third substrate is not more than 50 μ m.

16. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 8 or 10, wherein:
a diameter of the through-hole for the ink outlet formed on the third substrate is smaller than a diameter of tapered end of the through-hole on the second substrate in said process F; and
the through-hole for the ink outlet on the third substrate is aligned to approximately a center of the diameter of the narrower end of the through-hole on the second substrate in said process C.

20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 17. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 15, wherein, in the case that the second substrate is 0.8mm or less in thickness, the following condition is applied to the thickness of the second substrate:
 $1.2x(rg-rs) \text{ to } 1.9x(rg-rs)$,
where "rg" is the diameter of the larger end of the tapering through-hole formed on the second substrate and "rs" is the diameter of the through-hole for the ink outlet formed on the third substrate.

18. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 7, further comprising the steps of:
a process A4 of forming a groove for the ink outlet partially communicating with the through-hole for the pressure chamber on the first substrate; and
a process I of forming a through-section for the ink channel on the second substrate.

19. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 18, wherein the opening of the through-hole for the pressure chamber and the through-hole for the ink inlet on the first substrate and the through-section for the ink channel on the second substrate are aligned and bonded to partially communicate with each other and form an ink channel.

20. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 18, wherein the groove for the ink outlet is formed on an edge of the first substrate in said process A4.

5

21. The production method of a fluid ejection device claim 18, wherein:

a recessed section is formed on the first substrate;

10

the groove for the ink outlet is formed transversely of the recessed portion;

an opening section is formed at a right angle to the longitudinal direction of the groove for the ink outlet; and

15

a process of cuffing the first substrate along the recessed portion without contacting the opening section.

22. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 17, further comprising a process of cuffing the first substrate at a right angle to the longitudinal direction of the groove for the ink outlet formed on the first substrate.

20

25

23. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to one of claim 8, claim 10, and claim 18, wherein the ink channel is formed with an area 0.5 to 1.5 times as large as that of the ink outlet.

30

24. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to one of claim 8, claim 10, and claim 18, wherein the ink channel is formed in said processes A2, A3 or I in a manner that its area tapers towards the ink outlet

35

25. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to one of claim 8, claim 10, and claim 18, wherein the first substrate is a silicon single-crystal substrate; the second substrate, a glass substrate; and each of the third and fourth substrates, one of glass and silicon single-crystal substrates.

40

26. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to one of claim 8, claim 10, and claim 18, wherein bonding method conducted in said process B, C and H is the direct bonding.

45

27. The production method of a fluid ejection device according to claim 25, wherein a silicon substrate is etched by reactive ion etching, and a glass substrate is processed by the sand-blasting.

50

55

FIG. 1

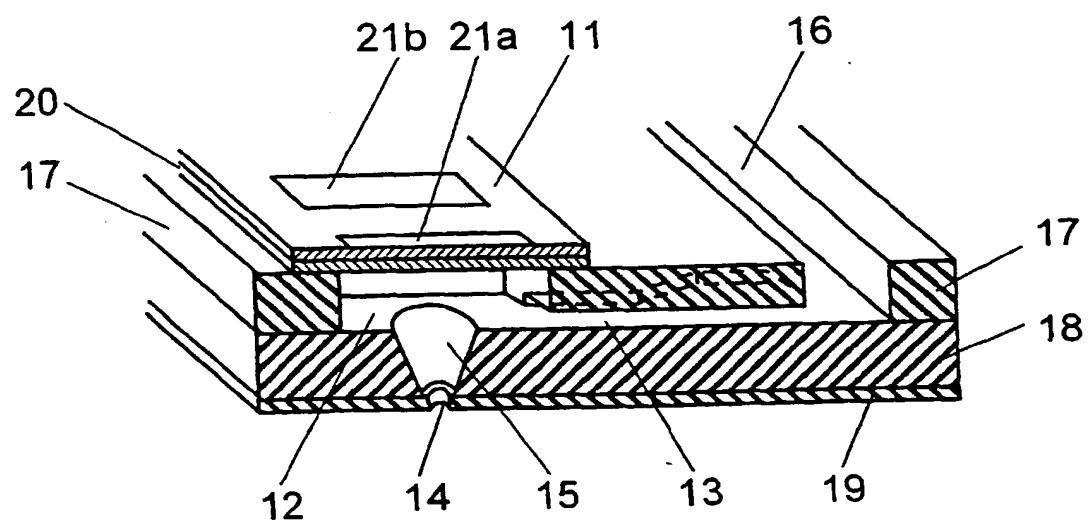


FIG. 2A

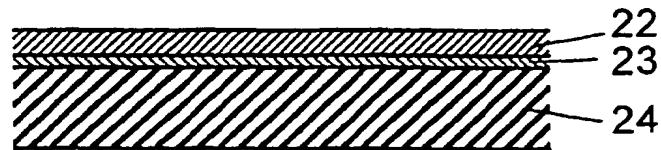


FIG. 2B

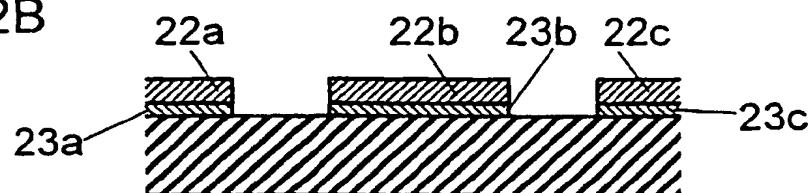


FIG. 2C

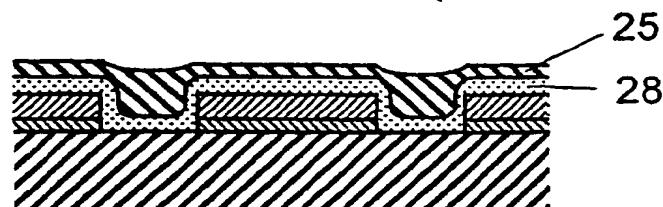


FIG. 2D

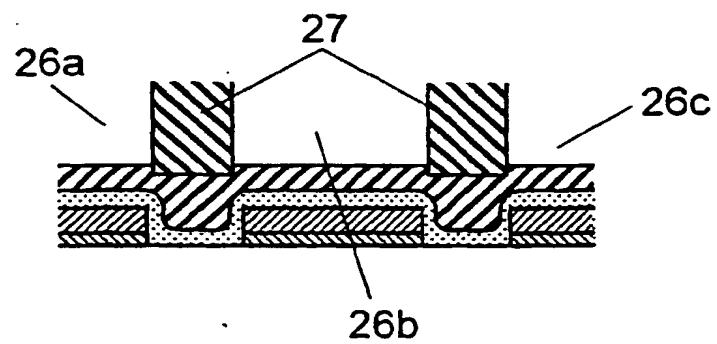


FIG. 3A

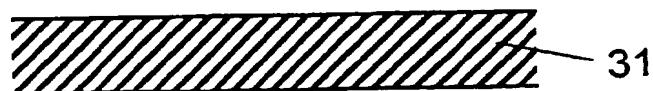


FIG. 3B

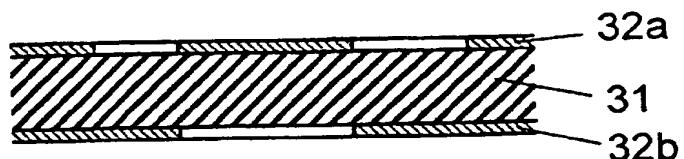


FIG. 3C

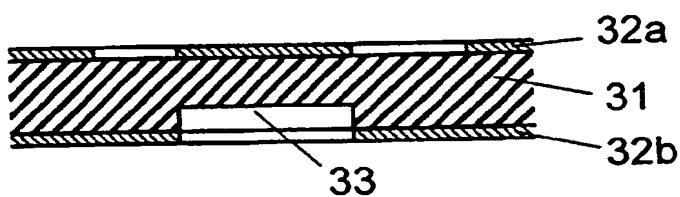


FIG. 3D

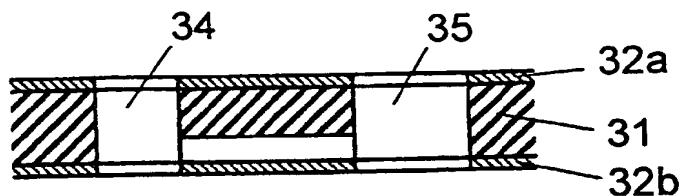


FIG. 3E

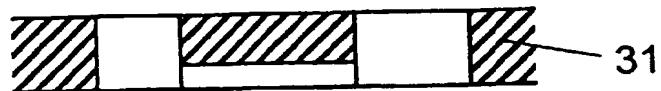


FIG. 4A

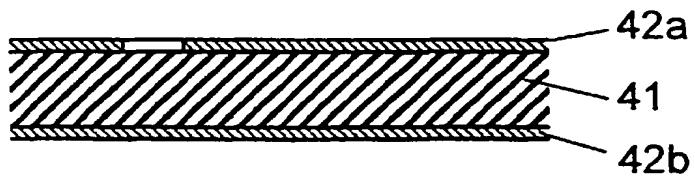


FIG. 4B

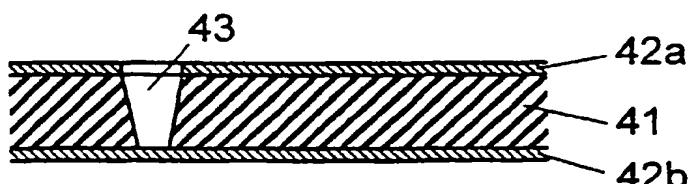


FIG. 4C

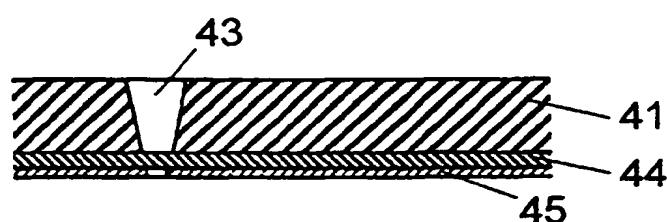


FIG. 4D

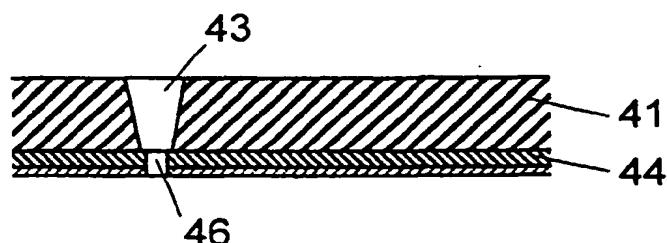


FIG. 4E

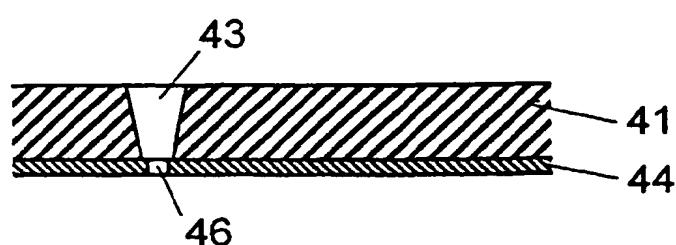


FIG. 5A

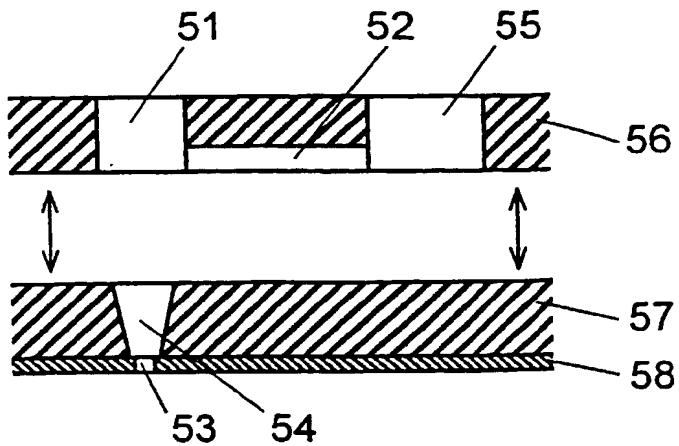


FIG. 5B

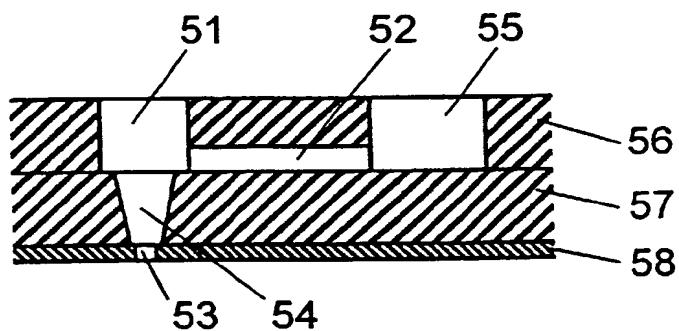


FIG. 5C

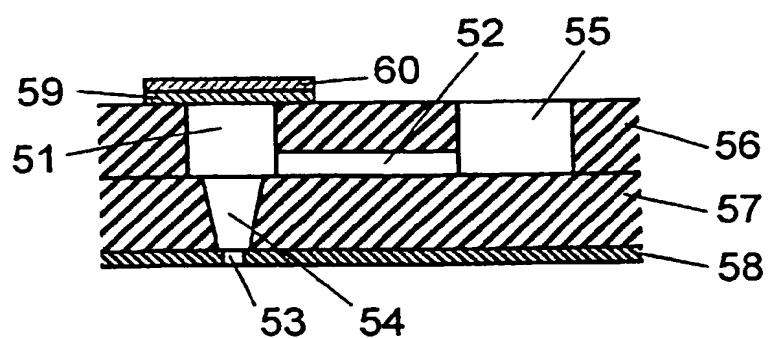


FIG. 5D

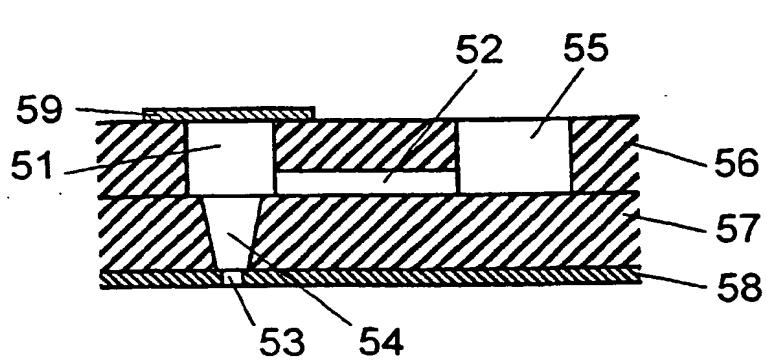


FIG. 6A



FIG. 6B



FIG. 6C

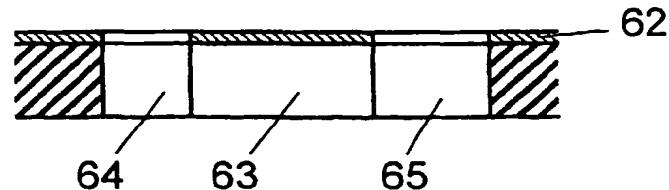


FIG. 6D

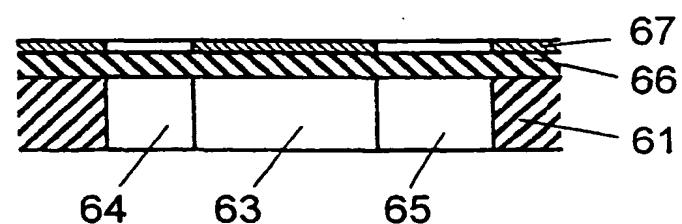


FIG. 6E

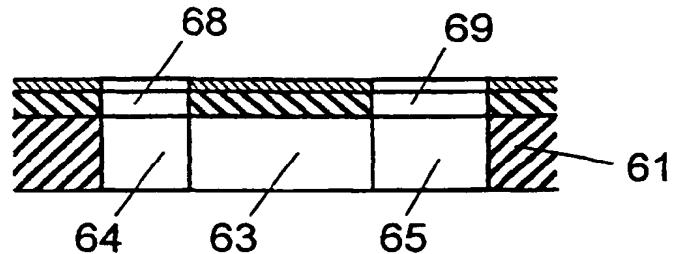


FIG. 6F

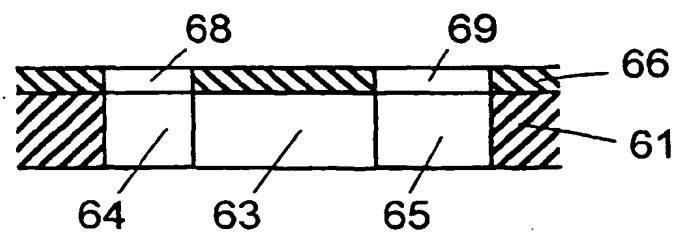


FIG. 7A

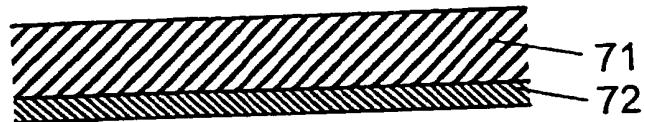


FIG. 7B

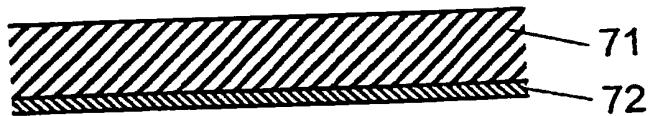


FIG. 7C

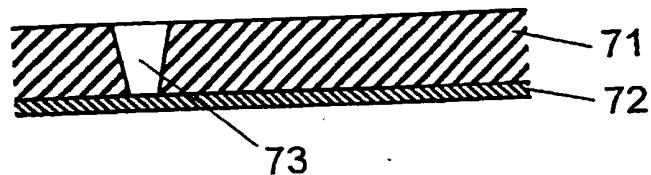


FIG. 7D

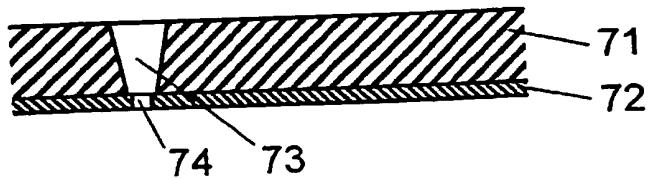


FIG. 8

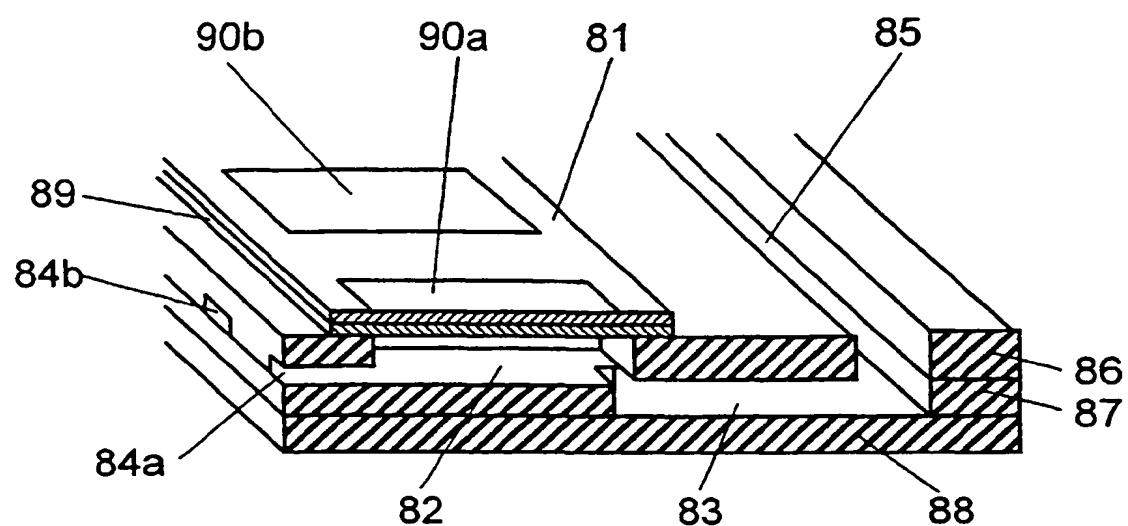


FIG. 9A

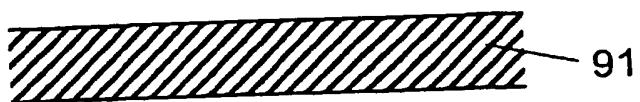


FIG. 9B

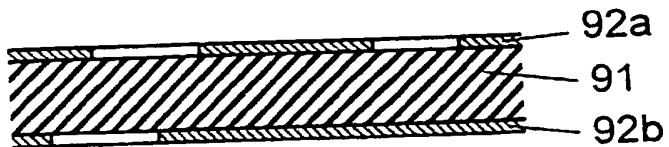


FIG. 9C

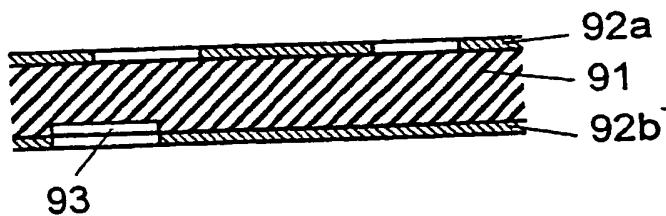


FIG. 9D

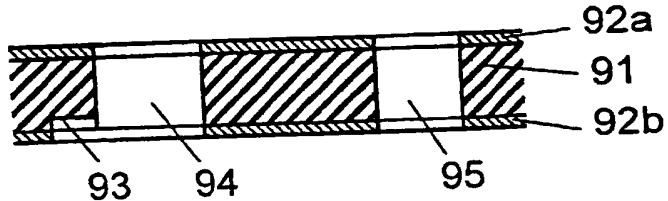


FIG. 9E

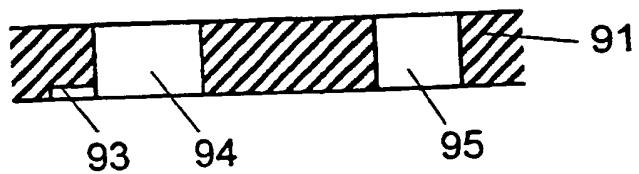


FIG. 10A

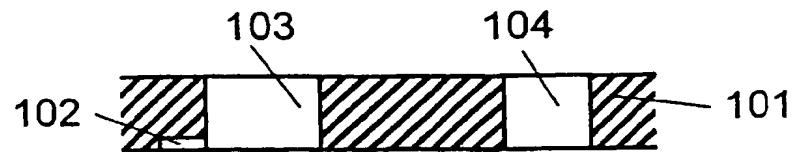


FIG. 10B

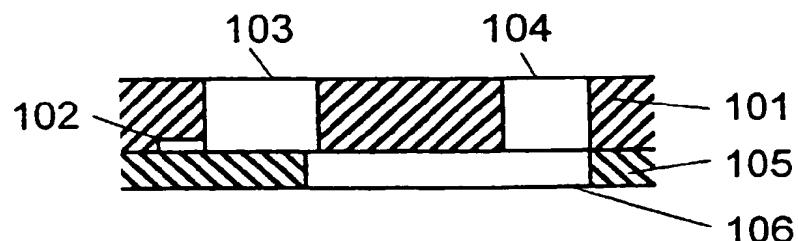


FIG. 10C

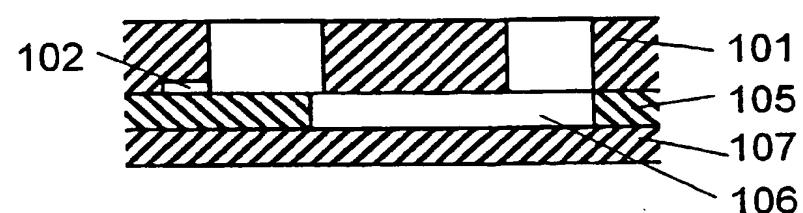


FIG. 10D

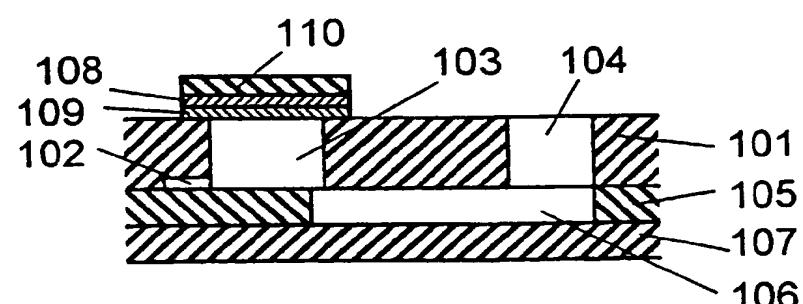


FIG. 10E

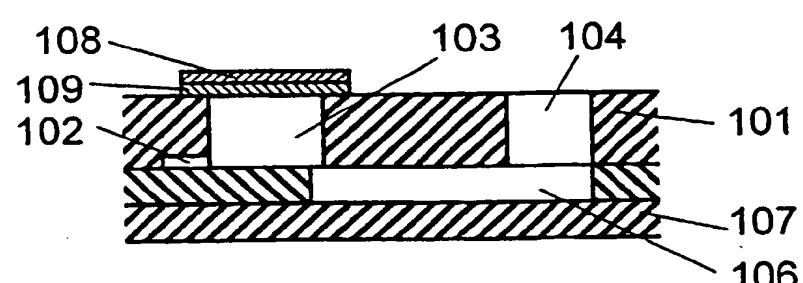


FIG. 10F

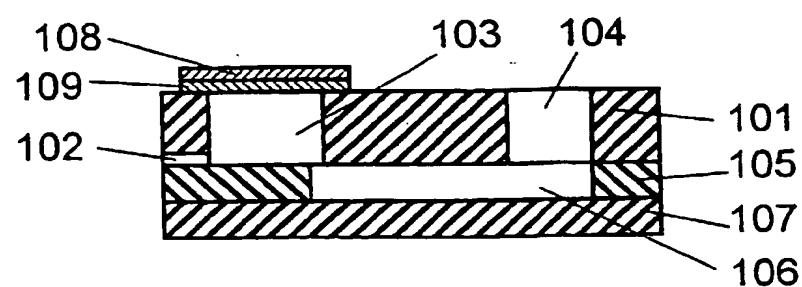


FIG. 11 PRIOR ART

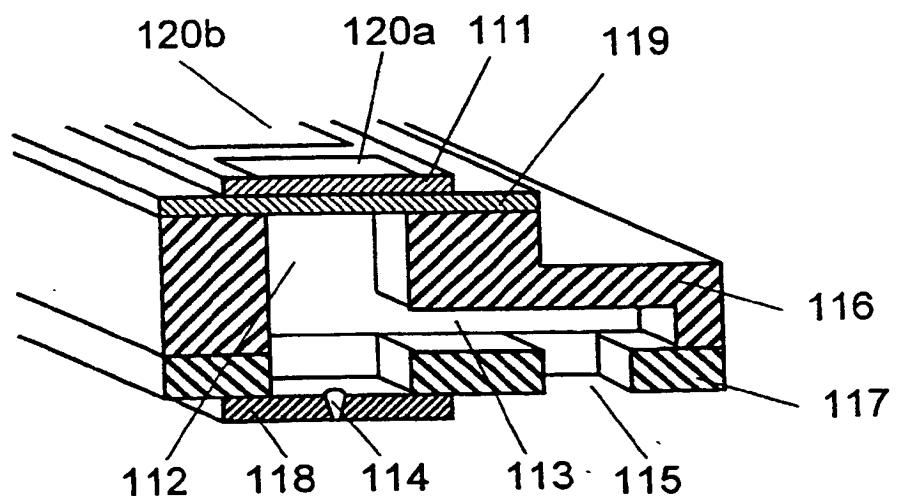


FIG. 12

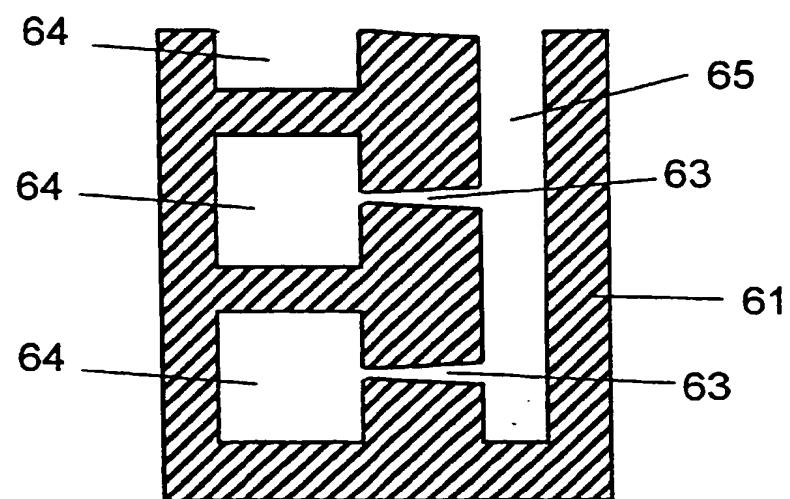


FIG.13A

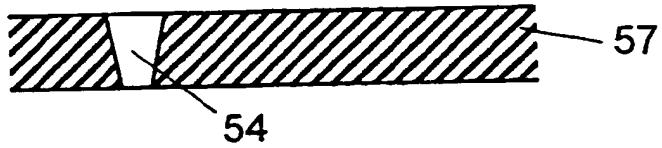


FIG.13B

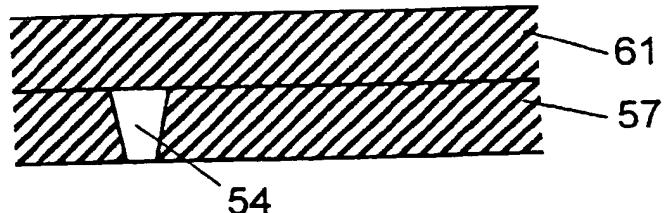


FIG.13C

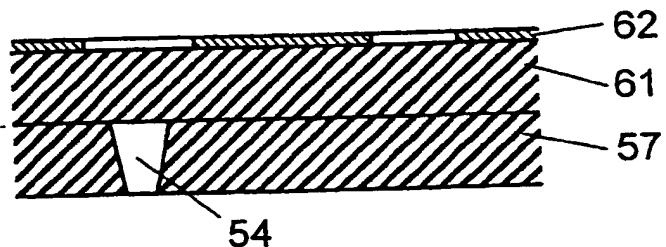


FIG.13D

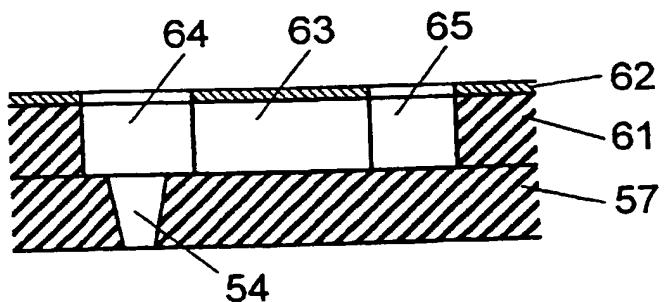


FIG.13E

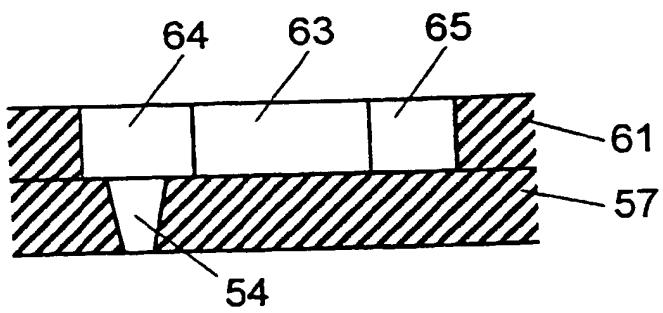


FIG. 14A

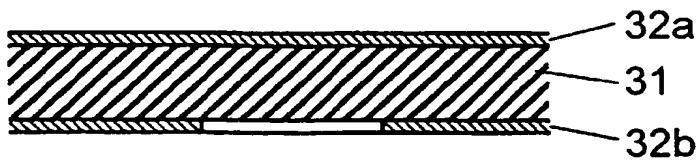


FIG. 14B

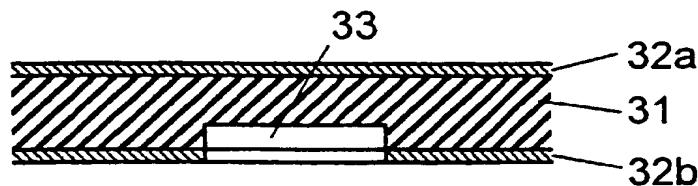


FIG. 14C

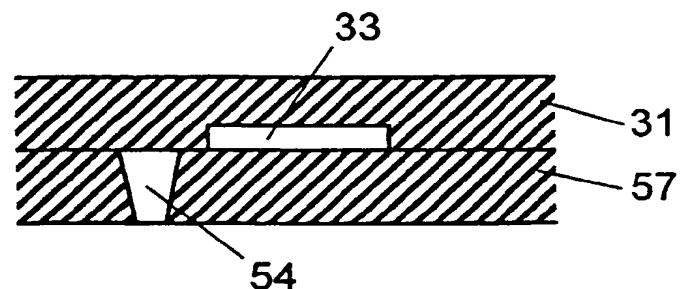


FIG. 14D

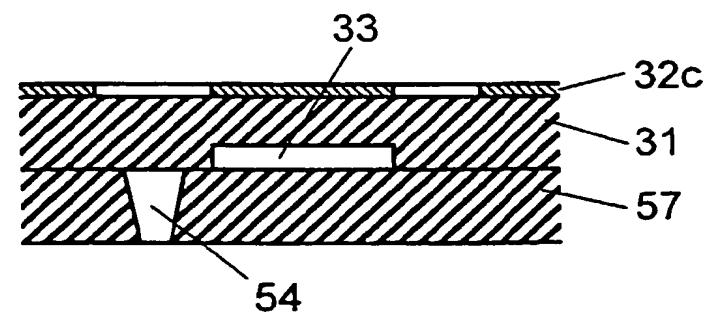


FIG. 14E

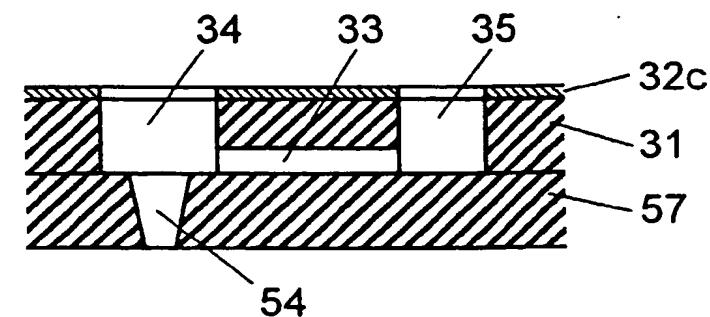


FIG. 15A

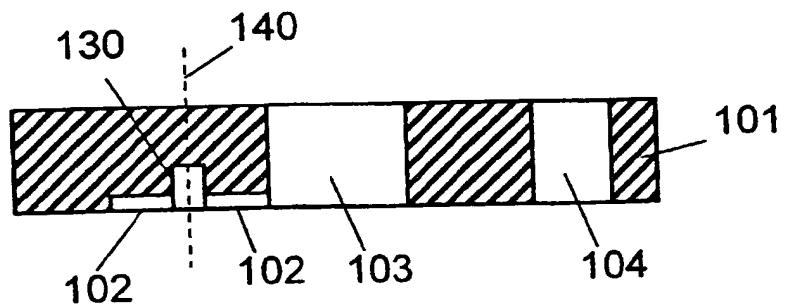
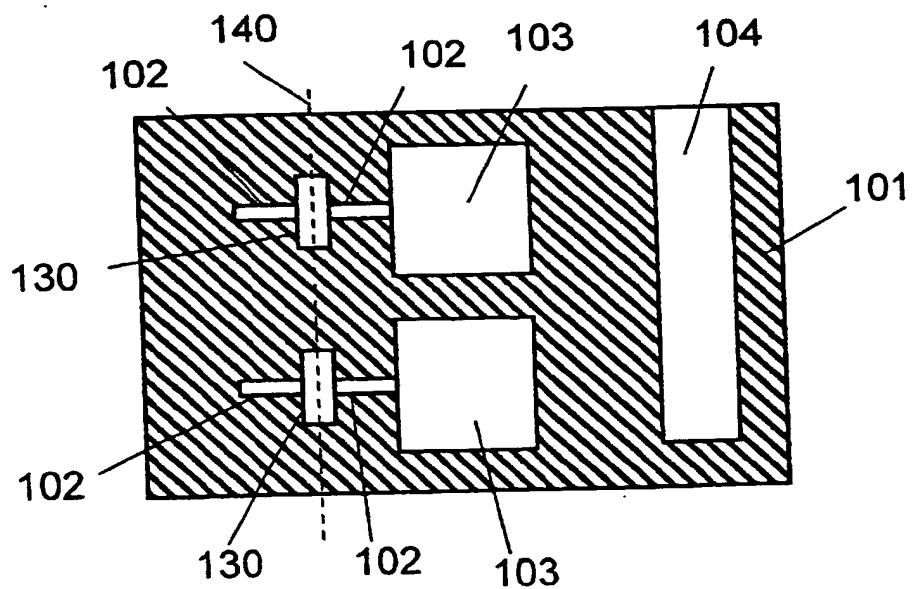


FIG. 15B



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT		International application No. PCT/JP99/03198																																	
A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER Int.Cl ⁶ B41J2/045, B41J2/055, B41J2/16																																			
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC																																			
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) Int.Cl ⁶ B41J2/045, B41J2/055, B41J2/16																																			
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1922-1996 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-1999 Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-1999 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-1999																																			
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)																																			
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Category*</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Relevant to claim No.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">X</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">JP, 05-286131, A (Rohm Co., Ltd.), 2 November, 1993 (02. 11. 93) (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Y</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">X</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">JP, 10-290033, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 27 October, 1998 (27. 10. 98) (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Y</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Y</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">JP, 09-267479, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 14 October, 1997 (14. 10. 97) (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Y</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">JP, 09-286101, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 4 November, 1997 (04. 11. 97) (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.	X	JP, 05-286131, A (Rohm Co., Ltd.), 2 November, 1993 (02. 11. 93) (Family: none)	1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27	Y			A			X	JP, 10-290033, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 27 October, 1998 (27. 10. 98) (Family: none)	1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27	Y			A			Y	JP, 09-267479, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 14 October, 1997 (14. 10. 97) (Family: none)	6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27	A			Y	JP, 09-286101, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 4 November, 1997 (04. 11. 97) (Family: none)	6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27	A		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.																																	
X	JP, 05-286131, A (Rohm Co., Ltd.), 2 November, 1993 (02. 11. 93) (Family: none)	1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27																																	
Y																																			
A																																			
X	JP, 10-290033, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 27 October, 1998 (27. 10. 98) (Family: none)	1, 2, 5 6-13 14-27																																	
Y																																			
A																																			
Y	JP, 09-267479, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 14 October, 1997 (14. 10. 97) (Family: none)	6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27																																	
A																																			
Y	JP, 09-286101, A (Seiko Epson Corp.), 4 November, 1997 (04. 11. 97) (Family: none)	6-13 1, 2, 5, 14-27																																	
A																																			
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.																																			
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed																																			
"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family																																			
Date of the actual completion of the international search 10 September, 1999 (10. 09. 99)		Date of mailing of the international search report 21 September, 1999 (21. 09. 99)																																	
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Japanese Patent Office		Authorized officer																																	
Facsimile No.		Telephone No.																																	

